

ANNEST, N.H. PURGATORY - SMITH - 1890

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HISTORY
—OF—
PURGATORY,
AND THE
EARLY SETTLERS.

PUBLISHED BY W. B. ROTCH.

1890.



WONDERFUL PURGATORY.

THE EARLY SETTLERS.

*Abstract of an Address delivered
at Hutchinson's Grove, Pur-
gatory Falls, August
22, 1889.*

BY C. J. SMITH.

I am here to contribute my mite to the festivities which the proprietor of these grounds initiated eight years since. This day an additional element is inaugurated here. Those known wherever the English tongue is spoken have thrilled and charmed us with sweet music, and as my first historical item I would recall the fact that more than fifty years since these wilds were often trod by the young feet of that famed band of vocalists, the survivors of which are here to honor this occasion. I only hope that this new element may be permanent and that annually in the years to come abler and more attractive voices than mine may be heard amid these solemn pines interesting and instructing the throngs who shall gather beneath their shade. The theme assigned me is "Purgatory and the early Settlers," which limits me to this narrow valley and its near surroundings, and I shall not extend my view beyond the sharp and rugged hill, at the base of which is the channel of the brook. Purgatory! Its wonders I will not attempt

to portray. The physical aspects of this mighty cleft which Nature has so grandly wrought are open to all eyes. The student of geologic formations, the sight-searching only for the curious may inspect for themselves. How *few*, or how *many* thousands of years it has required your water course, which to-day is but a petty stream, in its way oceanward to cleave ~~pasunder~~ the vast ledges below, to hollow out the excavations and wear smooth their surfaces, to shape the varid rock forms into so strange resemblances I will neither make a subject of explanation or speculation. Doubtless this gorge had a human history long ere the Anglo Saxon set foot here. The dusky tribes of the forest, no doubt frequented it to gaze in awe and wonder. Representatives of pre-historic ages doubtless carved their names and symbols upon huge rocks down the flume which water action has disintegrated and dissolved. Oblivion has swallowed all. By what name the races that preceded us knew this wonder. For well nigh a century the Falls have borne their present name and for many years the same appellation has attached to the brook. Eighty years since it was known as Wainwright brook. Purgatory, as a name applied to this locality, is a *misnomer*, and has no significance. It is presumed that a dogma of the Papal church suggested it, but those who understand the Roman Catholic doctrine well know that the originators were ignorant of the belief they sought to burlesque, but embalmed by use it will adhere so long as the English speaking people inhabit here.

Historically I have found the field not fertile in reminiscence old or new. Upon exploring that marvel known as "the bean pot," it is found that 100 years since sundry persons sought to perpetuate their memory by graving their names with date upon the circular wall. The first that appears is William Venner, 1771, and before the century closed others had carved their memorial here.

More than forty years ago an uncle of Mr. H. C. Dodge, then residing with him on the hill, one-half a mile eastward, was startled at the dead of night by a noise from this direction like distant thunder. Following the ravine the next morning nearly to the Lower Falls there was found a mighty boulder which detached by some force of gravity from its bed on the western bank had tumbled more than one hundred feet into the abyss leaving behind a track of destruction which told of its frightful momentum and crushing power. Though the chances might seem good for serious accidents in the wilds below us, none have been reported as having occurred. The nearest approach was an adventure which happened to Mr. George Worcester and which may be worthy of narration. A few years since Mr. W. was employed in cutting wood and lumber on a lot half a mile to the northwest of the Upper Falls. Himself and a companion bethought themselves to take a peep at Purgatory, much of which they had heard, but never had seen. So one fine morning late in Winter they proceeded hither without a guide. Approaching on the westerly side of the great gulf just be-

low the Upper Falls, where there is a descent of over 100 feet, 60 or 70 of which is perpendicular, Worcester was in advance of his companion and at the top of the hill found himself slipping on the icy snow and, nothing impeding his sliding movement, down he rolled, lodging in several feet depth of slushy snow at the bottom of the chasm, and the marvel is that he was not killed by the prodigious fall. He was somewhat bruised and shocked, but not a bone was broken. Gathering himself up he made his way on foot towards the lot meeting his terrified chum on the way with others alarmed by him, expecting to return with a mangled and lifeless corpse. Mr. W. is still living hale and hearty. He served three years in the 2d N. H. Regiment, and can say that exposure unharmed was crowned by a fall of 100 feet into the abyss of Purgatory in double quick time.

In the interval between the close of the French and Indian war and the war for Independence many deserters from the British army found refuge in New Hampshire where the opportunities were good for escape from capture. Prior to 1770 a young English soldier named Hodgeman came into the vicinity of Amherst. A few months later, learning that scouts were on his track he sought concealment in this neighborhood. Stephen Peabody, who had built and then occupied a large house at the top of Strawberry Hill, the cellar of which is yet visible, befriended the refugee. He located him in this ravine as his hiding place during the day, receiving his food from his protector's table and at night-

fall would steal up to Peabody's for lodging. He afterwards married, settled in Amherst, served in the Revolutionary army, abandoned the name of Hodgeman and was afterwards known as William Brown, raised a family of children and died in Amherst in February, 1825, aged 86. Nearly eighty years after this man found a shelter here his grandson, Robert Brown, became the owner of the farm which included the Upper fall. The farm is still in the occupancy of the family, a great-great-grandson of Hodgeman, the first *settler* of Purgatory, being the owner. Two years since, Mr. Hutchinson, to complete the ownership of the surroundings, purchased of Leonard Brown, Jr., a parcel of land which includes the mighty wonder below us.

When the present century opened the territory about us embracing Purgatory was the property of Widow Abigail H. Hartshorn of Reading, Mass. In 1802, she sold to Ezekiel Upton of Mt. Vernon a tract of 60 acres measuring 60 rods from West to East and 100 rods from North to South. In 1805, Mr. Upton deeded to his son Ezekiel, Jr., 40 acres of this tract on the westerly side, the eastern boundary line being "Wainwright Brook." The remaining 40 acres doubtless became the property of the junior Upton by inheritance, as about the year 1824 he built a dam at the head of the Upper fall whose stream descended into the channel and erected a Grist mill for the convenience of the neighborhood. This mill was reached by a spur which left the main road, a few rods up the hill. The customers of the mill who

were not numerous, usually brought their grain on horseback as the mill was difficult of access by carriage and hardly safe by horseback, as Mr. Eli Curtis's sad experience proved. He was riding a valuable young horse on this rough side road, when a false step among the loose stones caused the fracture of one of the beast's front legs and sent his owner home poorer by more than \$100. The mill was tended through its whole history by Mr. Wm. Marvell, then living where Leonard G. Brown now has his home. It was run four or five years. Finally, the patronage being so slight as to render the concern unprofitable, the structure and all its appurtenances was sold to Micah Hartshorn, who set it up two miles west in Lyndebrough where it now stands, the property of Mr. S. N. Hartshorn.

The Purgatory mill was a failure. Had it been otherwise how much it would mar whatever of the picturesque, the sublime may centre here. We may readily conceive that the unseen intelligences that have for ages wrought in his laboratory of Nature blasted this enterprise as evidence that this grand temple, was dedicated higher uses.

It is freely conceded that as natural curiosity these falls have no equal in Southern New Hampshire. Fifty years since they had a reputation which every season drew hundreds to their cavernous recesses. Mr. H. C. Dodge, who for nearly 40 years occupied the Dodge farm buildings now vacant, nearly 3-4th of a mile distant near the summit eastward informs me that through all these years

his place was the rendezvous for pilgrims and picnickers. Often a stage coach or other four-horse vehicle chartered and filled in the neighboring towns would appear early in the day. The teams were put up at Dodge's, the provision baskets were taken in hand and down the hill they travelled to then pathless belt of forest and down the sharp and precipitous declivity, to explore the depths below shrouded by the overhanging forest.

At the Upper Fall, the rush of the torrent through the channel to the gulf when the brook is swollen, is a stirring sight. Those who were here just after the freshet of Oct. 1869, had a most memorable experience. The canal or channel leading to the gulf is 40 feet long, 12 feet wide with an average depth of 18 feet. At that time the rushing mass of water filled it brim full, from rock to rock-bank. Such a body of nearly 9000 cubic feet of water, wildly pressing on to a perpendicular plunge of 40 feet into the "gulf" and the seething foam coming up from the fall of the cataract into the chasm, made up a spectacle most grand and impressive. So impetuous was this flood that the wind current produced by the whirling water bent the small trees to the earth.

But I return to the latter clause of my theme "early settlers" and I find an item of historic interest connected with these surroundings. In the year 1742, Mr. William Peabody moved from Boxford, Mass., and settled on a large intervale farm, on the Souhegan, in what is now Milford. His father, Capt. Stephen

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had been one of the original proprietors of Souhegan West. William, in 1760 was the heaviest tax payer and the wealthiest man in the old town of Amherst. His first born son, Stephen, born in 1742 was a very active youth, with talent which inclined him to military life, and obtained some training of this sort as a sub officer or aid in the war of 1756-63. In the latter year he married at 21, Hannah Goffe Chandler from one of the first families in Bedford and acquiring several hundred acres, including Purgatory, and its neighborhood, erected on yonder summit a mansion-like dwelling, more spacious than any other, then, in what is now Mt. Vernon. At the opening of the war for Independence his previous martial experience and family influence advanced him to a position of rank. At Bunker Hill we find him Adjutant of Col. Reed's regiment ; at Bennington, an aid to Gen. Stark, and in 1778, Lt. Col. of a battalion sent to Rhode Island. He was a valiant soldier and officer, rendering valuable service to his country. He did not survive the war, but died at home Sept. 3, 1780, aged 38 years, leaving a wife and 7 children. A suitable stone marks his resting place in the cemetery in Mont Vernon village. His three sons also one daughter, became physicians, the latter being the wife of Gen. Perley Davis, of Montpelier, Vt. His eldest son, Thomas was at 18 years Surgeon in Col. Evan's Reg't. The vestiges of the Peabody cellar may be seen northeasterly from the venerable elm at the top of Purgatory. Who shall say that the annualist has not found a hero among the "early settlers."

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